

Exploring the connection between Language and Environment: A book review of Arran Stibbe's *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By* (2015)

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Abstract

Arran Stibbe's *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By* (2015) offers a detailed exploration of the interplay between language and the environment, presenting a critical analysis of how language influences human interactions with the natural world. Stibbe examines the ways in which language can be both destructive and life-sustaining, covering diverse topics from nature writing to urban development, agribusiness, and climate change. The book focuses on specific aspects of the 'stories we live by,' including ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure, and salience. The review outlines the structure of Stibbe's book, which comprises ten chapters progressively developing and applying ecolinguistic theories and methods. It emphasizes the importance of ecolinguistic analysis in understanding and intervening in ideologies, discourses, and social practices that shape human perceptions of nature. This essay provides a comprehensive review of Stibbe's work, highlighting its practical and detailed approach to the emerging field of ecolinguistics. The essay acknowledges the book's valuable contribution to sociolinguistic research, particularly in addressing the ecological crisis. The essay concludes by recognizing the book's timely relevance in the face of the impending climate crisis and the urgent need for critical engagement with the stories embedded in language.

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, Arran Stibbe, discourse analysis, environmental communication, sociolinguistics, ecological crisis.

Ecolinguistics (2015) by Arran Stibbe takes a detailed and practical approach to an emerging field that critically analyzes how language is implicated in human engagement with the natural environment. It seeks to understand how language is engaged in both destructive and life-sustaining ways. From nature writing to urban development, and from agribusiness to climate change, Arran Stibbe takes the reader through a series of interesting analyses across ten chapters that progressively develop and apply the theories and methods of ecolinguistics. Stibbe brings together an extensive range of analytical methods and concepts into a proposed framework and draws on a heterogeneous collection of texts to prove the rationality – and importance – of ecolinguistic analysis. For the sake of our planet Earth and all life dependent on it, we are urged to critically engage with the stories we live by.

The first chapter presents ecolinguistics as a rigorous approach well suited to reveal, resist, and intervene in the ideologies, discourses, and social practices – all different aspects of the 'stories we live by' – influencing our understanding of and

involvement with Nature. It makes apparent numerous things: why we should do ecolinguistics; what is ecolinguistics, or can be; the aims and purpose of the book; the author's attitude to ecolinguistics; and the book's ecosophy. The next eight chapters go on to investigate the various forms the stories that we live by take. Apart from its introduction and conclusion, the book consists of eight main chapters, each one focusing on one of the following types of 'stories': ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure, and salience. Chapter 2 begins with a theoretical overview of discourse and ideology in ecolinguistics, focusing on a set of discourse-analytic methods and sample analyses that both describe and attack environmentally destructive discourses. In Chapter 2 Stibbe delivers an outline of framing in discourse analysis drawing on approaches from a variety of research methods and applying these various methods to a scrutiny of the framing of 'sustainable' development discourse.

Chapter 3 is effectively titled "Frames and Framing". For Stibbe, ideologies are stories that appear in discourse, and a critical linguistic analysis involves the exposure of those stories by detecting the relevant linguistic features. In chapter 4, the author investigates the importance of metaphor, most importantly with regards to 'the corporation is a person'. This metaphor is examined in detail here as an influential linguistic stratagem for determining perceptions of the corporation and its defining role in society. Stibbe goes on to the study of assessment and judgement designs in Chapter 5, analysing a range of texts, like weather forecasts in the UK, junk food, concepts of success, and Japanese haiku poetry. In chapter 6, the topic shifts to identity. Here Stibbe discusses how various identity creations establish different relationships towards the environment. In the latter half of this chapter an added in-depth study of the ecological networks between gender identity, health, and consumerism. This chapter reveals the methods by which texts, particularly advertising texts, can create and emphasise identities, and which ask the readers to identify with those stories and engage in ecologically harmful work and attitudes. Counter-discourses encourage more ecologically helpful stories by, for example, placing Man in co-hyponymic relationships with other members of the natural world, rather than disseminating the idea (or story) that humans are exceptional.

Chapter 7 shifts to an investigation of facticity patterns employed in discourse. Noteworthy is the final section of this chapter where the author examines climate change counter-movement discourse which explores how uncertainty is created around the science/ fact of climate change. In chapter 8 the importance of erasure in discourse, or the disregarding of certain areas of life as immaterial or insignificant, becomes the focal topic. It discusses not only the erasure of animals and nature from anthropocentric texts but also the erasure of humans from representations of the natural world. In this chapter, Stibbe reflects upon the role of erasure in ecosystem assessment reports. The author shows how these reports erase the natural world as animals and plants and are absorbed by categorization structures that reduce nature as a 'resource' or a 'service'. As against erasure, chapter 9 inspects the role of salience in discourse, notably analyzing the multimodal depiction of animals in the imagery of livestock food production. The last chapter summarizes the earlier chapters, recognizes previous criticisms of ecolinguistics, and succinctly reasons for new directions for future ecolinguistic research.

In totality, Arran Stibbe's *Ecolinguistics* provides a valuable contribution to sociolinguistic research by discovering how the critically driven study of discourse in

society should redress the ecological crisis of our times. The book ends on this positive note which is characteristic of Stibbe's unwaveringly optimistic style and sets it apart from the more cynical and drastically ecocentric works in ecology and related fields. His method of discourse analysis is a constructive one in that it is not only critical of problematic discourses but also seeks substitute ones. Stibbe's ecosophy can be specifically said to be "Living", and stresses the welfare of all species, the worth of living, understanding, care, and empathy towards other animate beings, living within environmental boundaries, achieving a good quality of life for the future, establishing increased equality in society and growing resilience for continued survival. The emphasis is, however, that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' ecosophy, and that this is not certainly the most apposite for all ecolinguistic inquiries. *Ecolinguistics* is, in toe with its own ecosophy, a celebration of all life on Earth; it endorses nature without reproving the human, and inspires the reader to think further critically about humans and the non-human world. Most importantly, the book is a quest for action: What can linguistics do for our planet? Stibbe's inferences are modest, but his investigations validate the possibility of extremely enlightening inquiries into ordinary discourse from an ecological viewpoint. He calls on an extensive range of probable users, linguists or otherwise, though some background familiarity with linguistic concepts will be needed to carry out studies as erudite as those offered in this book. The framework projected here, Stibbe adds, is not conclusive, but is meant as a guiding initial point for those creating or adjusting a framework of their own.). The use of a moral ecosophy and the eclectic approach to data and methods might be negated as subjective and random, but in the contemporary scenario of 'objective', impersonal, big-data linguistics, a more individual, philosophical, and (critically) subjective style such as this is a stimulating one. *Ecolinguistics* is perceptively and positively written, convincingly reasoned, and vital to all discourse analysts and critical ecologists. In the current situation of the impending climate crisis that we face, this book by Stibbe is not so much opportune as overdue.

References:

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